



Difficult to believe, but when he first brutalised Zeenat Aman and then Padmini Kolhapure, Raj Babbar is believed to have repulsed as well as excited women in the audience.

The actor turns away, his face a beetroot red, when asked whether it's true that women were clamouring to be "raped" by him after the release of *Insaf Ka Tarazu*. He explains with a touch of profundity, "The character of Ramesh could well have been out of a Bertolt Brecht play. He evoked alienation as well as involvement."

Babbar admits that the female response to the film was overwhelming. "Women in the audience did give me *gaalis*," he says, "but when they went home, many of them either called up or wrote to say that they wanted me to rape them. It was a great morale-booster for a newcomer."

**I DID INSANE for a
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MONEY**

Zeenat Aman

B.R.Chopra's *Insaf Ka Tarazu* (1980) was a whopper hit. Eyes glinting, steely determination writ large on his face, Ramesh viciously gagged and bound Bharati (Zeenat Aman) to the bed before he despicably brutalised her. Reason: She had rebuffed his advances.

As if that sequence wasn't enough, a few reels later, there's a re-run. This time, with the younger sister Nita played by Padmini Kolhapure. Ramesh makes the nubile girl strip and parade in front of him. Her performance won Padmini the *Filmfare* Best Supporting Actress trophy.



Producer-director B.R. Chopra remembers, "For me, the story was always the key factor. Having started off as a journalist and writer, I know how to narrate a story."

The unusual aspect was the cast, toplined by two male newcomers. To an extent, Chopra did take a risk when he cast Raj Babbar in the role of Ramesh. It still remained to be seen whether Babbar, from the theatre world, could make the crossover from stage to screen.

Recalls Zeenat Aman, "Since I was fairly established, I was pretty open-minded about teaming up with freshers. In any case, I was extremely excited at the prospect of playing the central character in a heroine-oriented film. Chopra *saab* had a solid script and I had full faith in the project."

"I had no hang-ups that the character was a negative one," offers Babbar on being asked whether he had reservations about starting off in a negative mode. "I wanted a role which would leave an impact. I'd loitered around the studios for months with only vague promises made by producers. I was so desperate to bag *Insaf*... that I didn't tell Chopra *saab* about some two-bit roles I'd accepted just to make ends meet. I was scared that if Chopra *saab* found out about those roles, he'd show me the door."

Today, at his Juhu bungalow, the actor narrates, "Chopra *saab* wanted me to watch a video copy of *Lipstick* which had inspired *Insaf*... But I didn't have the

Rape!

INSAF KA TARAZU REVISITED

guts to tell him that I didn't own a VCR. Even for the publicity photo-session with Zeenat and Deepak Parasher, I wore Ravi Chopra's T-shirts. I didn't have decent clothes, forget a VCR."

Raj Babbar's stars were obviously bright. Otherwise he might have had to play the role of the conventional "hero" which went to Deepak Parasher. Both Babbar and Parasher had won the United Producers' talent contest together. Chopra had asked Parasher to choose his role. Parasher opted for the positive character since he wasn't too confident about carrying off the negative one.

Says Parasher in retrospect, "I made a mistake, I should have played Ramesh. If I had, Raj Babbar wouldn't have been where he is today. When we did *Nikaah* together, Raj grumbled that I had the better role. Again, he made a bigger impact. See, there were so many good-looking heroes like Sanjay Dutt around when I joined the movies that I was scared to do anything which wasn't heroic."

Working with Chopra *saab* was "a pleasure," his artistes affirm. For starters,

they had a bound script before shooting began.

Recalls Raj Babbar, "Chopra saab, the writer Shabid Kumar and I discussed my character minutely. Throughout the film, I keep playing with a key-chain. To get into the habit, I practised twirling a key-chain till it seemed like a natural trait."

Babbar remembers reading the script every day to seek out new interpretations. "When you only read your dialogue on the sets, the emotions rarely come through," he feels.

The actor says he'd be ready to emote hours before he had to give his shot. To live the part of Ramesh, he'd wear his suit and walk around, feeling like the millionaire he still wasn't.

Zeenat Aman points out that B.R.Chopra would also discuss how the shots should be edited with his artistes. "After all, we had to make sure the audience was horrified," she chuckles.

Vis-a-vis her traumatic rape scene, Padmini Kolhapure states, "I had no hesitations about doing that scene. It was integral to the script. There was no question of backing out. As long as I was in front of the camera, I maintained a professional attitude."

She smiles, "I was barely a teenager when I did *Insaf...* The credit for turning me into a mature actress should go to Chopra saab."

Zeenat Aman notes, "My rape scene was physically tortuous. I was pushed, kicked and thrown around. I remember I was hurting all over."

The aspect Zeenat found most exciting about her character Bharati was her doggedness in seeking justice. "And mercifully there was a happy ending too," she laughs, adding, "Incidentally, I did *Insaf...* for a tiny percentage. I wish I'd asked for a bigger percentage, then I'd have made more money," she grins.

The movie was a turning-point for Padmini Kolhapure. Nasir Husain signed her for *Zamane Ko Dikhana Hai* while she was shooting for a song with Zeenat and Deepak Parasher. The model-turned-actor was pencilled in for as many as 23 films, but none of them could ensure him a long innings as an actor.

Raj Babbar's career skyrocketed. After the first few days of shooting, word spread about Babbar's acting capabilities. Many film-makers turned up at the Centaur Hotel to watch him shoot for Chopra. The actor insists it was Zeenat Aman who praised him to other film-makers.

Would Raj Babbar allow his daughter Juhi to do an *Insaf...* or son Gorky to play an updated Ramesh? "Why not?" the dad answers. "As performers, I hope they get to play even more challenging roles than I have."

Meera Joshi



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Deepak Parasher